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The University of Dayton

News Release

Oct. 4, 1993

Contact: Candace Stuart

EMMY AWARD-WINNING ACTOR AND ACTIVIST EDWARD ASNER TO SPEAK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON ON OCT. 14

DAYTON, Ohio -- Edward Asner, the acclaimed actor and activist who portrayed the popular TV character Lou Grant on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and the dramatic series "Lou Grant," will speak at the University of Dayton at 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 14, in the ballroom of the Kennedy Union on campus.

The lecture, titled "Morality and Freedom of Speech in the Media," is free and open to the public.

As the gruff but good-hearted Lou Grant, Asner symbolized many of the ideals of journalism, both as a no-fluff television producer in the comedy "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and as an ethical city editor in "Lou Grant." He won five Emmy awards for his Lou Grant portrayals and added two more to his collection for roles in "Rich Man, Poor Man" and "Roots."

"I fear the Lou Grants of this world are a dying breed, a species failing to adapt to a rapidly changing environment," Asner wrote in the prologue to *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in the News Media* by journalists Martin Lee and Norman Solomon. "I don't want the Lou Grants to become the dinosaurs of American journalism.

"As with any 'endangered species,' independent journalists find their environment becoming inhospitable. The atmosphere of greed and corporate mergers is choking out these journalists as 'media managers' take over -- managers more concerned with making a buck than reporting the news."

No stranger to the conflict between freedom of speech and corporate concerns, Asner saw the "Lou Grant" show phased out in the early 1980s after losing sponsors who feared the real-life Asner's criticism of U.S. policy in El Salvador might affect sales of their products. (CBS insisted it pulled the plug because of the show's falling ratings.)

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"He's concerned that profit margins increasingly seem to be what drives the TV industry today. Producers, writers, actors are concerned that they don't have the freedom to express themselves," said Kenneth Weare, an assistant professor in UD's religious studies department who worked with Asner in the '80s to raise relief funds for Salvadoran refugees. He and Asner are now involved in the Humanitarian Law Project, a human rights organization.

Despite his experiences and worries, Asner continues to speak out on matters that concern him the most: human rights and free speech. "When I reached celebrityhood and found myself in demand and requested to strike a blow for freedom, I realized I can't afford to turn down the chance," he remarked in *Newsweek* during the 1982 controversy.

Asner headed the Screen Actors Guild from 1981 to 1985 and often shows his support for union causes. He is active in several humanitarian and political groups and is a founding member of Medical Aid for El Salvador.

He was born in 1929 in Kansas City, Mo., the son of a Lithuanian-born Jew who ran a scrap-metal business. His temple and high school provided opportunities for him to explore his growing interests in the theater. Besides acting in plays, he was editor of his high school newspaper and a tackle on his school football team.

He attended the University of Chicago, where he joined the troupe "Tonight at Eight-Thirty." After a stint in the Army, he rejoined Chicago colleagues Mike Nichols, Paul Sills, Elaine May and others in 1953 to form an improvised comedy show, the precursor of Chicago's popular Second City.

Moving to New York, Asner tried his luck on Broadway, performing alongside stars like Jack Lemmon. He also was active in the American Shakespeare and New York Shakespeare festivals.

His career took off in the early 1960s when Asner moved to Hollywood, first playing roles on dramas such as "Naked City" and "Gunsmoke" and later as the surly foil to Mary Tyler Moore. After the acclaimed "Lou Grant" show ended, he took on a new role, that of a bigoted former policeman in "The Trials of Rosie O'Neil." His other recent roles include a part in Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," and in the miniseries, "Switched at Birth."

For more information on the Distinguished Speakers Series, call (513) 229-3333.

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To arrange interviews with **Edward Asner**, call **Candace Stuart** at (513) 229-3257. To interview **Kenneth Weare**, call (513) 229-2079.